Uppertown Firefighters Museum

UPPERTOWN FIREFIGHTERS MUSEUM

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Uppertown Firefighters Museum

by

Janet Stevenson

W.W. Parker
Astoria Fire Company Number 1

GROWTH OF THE DEPARTMENT

Before its paid Fire Department was established in 1897, Astoria had three volunteer fire departments, all of which were equipped with steam pumpers that had to be operated by strong-armed men. There was a hook and ladder company attached to one of the companies and a number of hose teams which competed in musters in Oregon and Washington State. The substantial amount of prize money they won was used to buy equipment and pay the expenses of the company.

The first volunteer fire company was formed in August of 1870 as the Astor #1, later changed to Astoria Fire Company #1. In November of that year, a hand pumper made by Hummerman arrived from Portland on the steamer *Okanagan* and was stored in Capt. George Flavel's warehouse at a rental of $3 per month.

The company eventually built a headquarters and hose-house at Seventh and Commercial Streets, which they shared with the Common (City) Council–an arrangement which generated considerable controversy. After several attempts by the Fire Company to oust the Council and by the Council to buy out the volunteers, a truce of sorts was achieved in September 1876, and the Astoria Fire Company turned their engine over to the Council.

Meanwhile, a second volunteer company–Rescue Company #2–had been organized in July 1877, with headquarters at 11th and Commercial (see accompanying illustration) and a Silsby steam engine, second class purchased for $5000 after it took a prize at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. Both volunteer companies wanted the engine, and the matter was settled by the tossing of a silver half-dollar.

The Alert Hook and Ladder Company (attached to the Astoria Fire Company #1) was organized on July 5, 1877. Only sparse records of its activities have been preserved, but its Hayes Patent 3rd Class ladder truck is the crown jewel of the Firefighters Museum collection.

The last engine company to organize was the Columbia Engine Company #3, formed in September 1890. It had 77 volunteers and a Clapp and Jones Steam Pumper, bought for it by the city for $4000.

Some of the volunteer companies continued to meet after the paid Astoria Fire Department was created and were able to render assistance in some emergency situations.

The Astoria Fire Department was created by the City Council in 1897, and C.H. Stockton, who had previously headed one of the volunteer companies, was named chief.

The Department consisted of fifteen paid men, the chief, four drivers and 11 "extra" or "call men." Its equipment consisted of:

1 Champion Chemical Wagon with twin 60 gallon tanks
2 Hose Wagons
3 Hose Reels (with 5000 ft. of hose)
6 Horses

Its reserve equipment included:
1 Silsby Steam Engine Third Class
1 Amoskeag Steam Engine Second Class
1 55-foot Hayes patent Third Class Ladder Truck

Half a century later in 1950, the Astoria Fire Department headed by Chief Wayne Osterby consisted of 19 paid men and 2 "sleepers," working a newlyinstituted 72-hour week. Its equipment consisted of:

1 750-gallon Mack triple combination pumper
2 500-gallon Fords with Mercury motors, triple combination
1 100-gallon Stutz triple combination
1 American LaFrance hose and chemical wagon
1 county disaster car
1 smoke ejector
6 and 10 ft. low pressure fog applicator pipes
2 high volume deck pipes
2 1/2 inch lines to a Y and
1 or 1 1/2 inch lines as leaders with Navy-type fog nozzles
2 1/2 inch Navy-type fog nozzles for more volume.

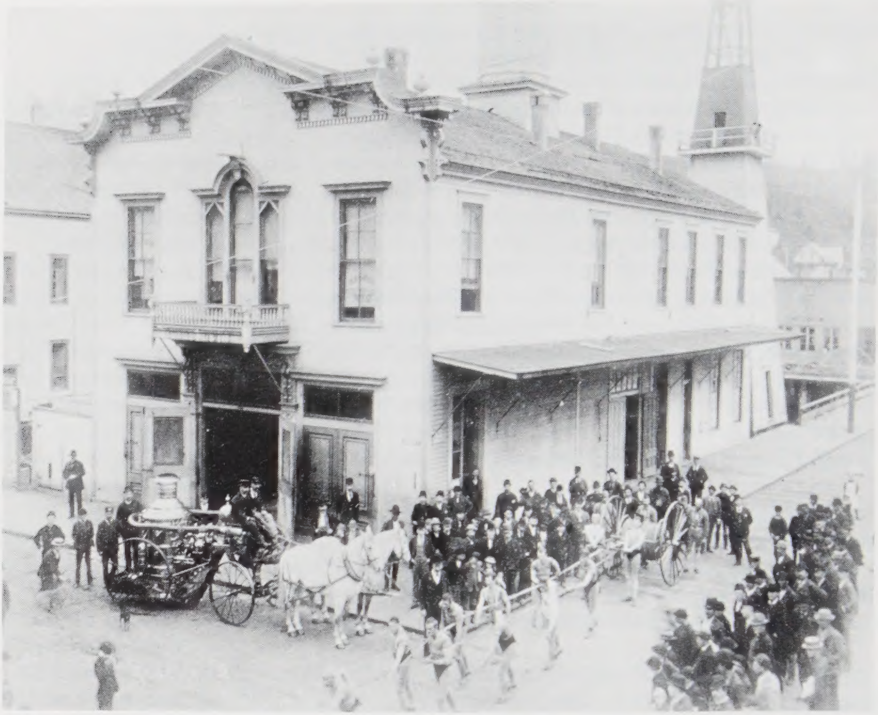
Note: examples of these nozzles are on display on the walls of the museum and in some of the cases on the second floor.

Fire alarm boxes connected to the Gamewell Alarm System were located at:

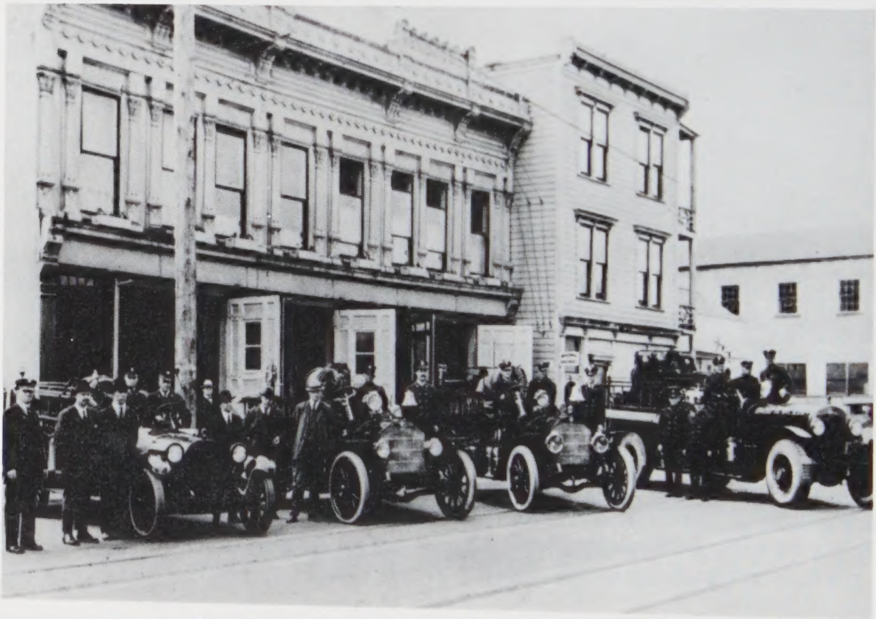
#4 Uniontown
#5 Electric Light Works, First & Astor
#6 Seventh and Astor
#7 Ninth and Duane
#8 Twelfth and Bond
#12 Thirty-third and Franklin
#14 MacGregor's Mill – Uppertown
#16 Sixteenth and Commerical

For further details and statistics see the interview with Former Chief Arni Rautio.

1992 firehouse, crew, and equipment.



Steam pumper, Rescue Company #2 , 11th & Commercial, Astoria



Astoria Fire Department, Central Station, 4th & Astor streets

HISTORIC FIRE STATIONS IN ASTORIA

The original Central Station was located at 4th and Astor and was later moved to 15th and Commercial, presently the site of Coast Rehabilitation. Over time, some auxiliary stations were established at varying distances from the center.

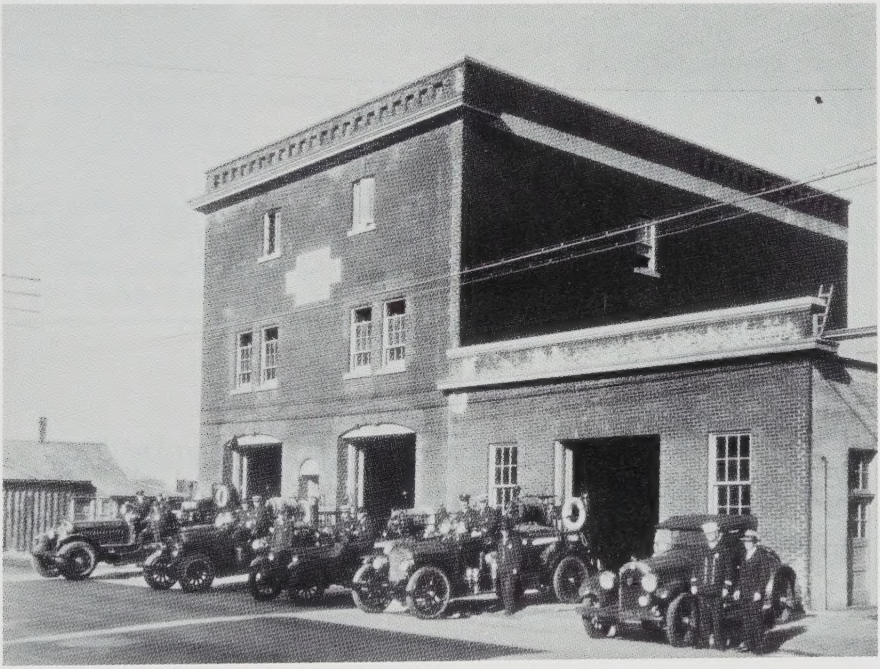
A chemical wagon obtained in 1895 was housed at Tenth and Bond Streets.

The Uniontown Station was established in 1910 in the same location as the present station, which was built in 1976.

The Uppertown Station was originally located at 28th and Franklin (now 2842 Marine Drive, where the Home Bakery stands). It was retired in 1928 when the Uppertown Station #2 (now the Firefighters Museum) was opened. The old wooden station was moved back on the lot and served as a warehouse for the new Home Bakery and the meeting rooms of the Columbia Club. The original Home Bakery, a wooden building that stood where there is now a parking lot, was destroyed by a fire in March 1943, which also destroyed the old fire station.

The brick building at 30th and Marine Drive (now the Firefighters Museum) was built in 1896 by Portland architect Emil Schact as an adjunct of the North Pacific Brewery. Closed by Prohibition in 1915, the old brewery stood empty for several years, but was acquired by the city and remodeled in 1920 to serve as the Uppertown Fire Station #2. The addition to the east was used to house the city's Road Maintenance Department.

Closed again in 1960 when the new Headquarters Station was opened behind it on 30th Street, it reopened as the Uppertown Firefighters Museum in, June 1990, 120 years after the organization of Astoria's first volunteer fire department.



Astoria Fire Department, Uppertown Station, 30th Street & Marine Drive

ASTORIA FIRE CHIEFS

C.H. STOCKTON 1897 to October 31, 1904

Astoria's first paid chief, had served previously as chief of volunteer department. Retired after 7 years.

C.E. FOSTER October 31, 1904 to January 1, 1923

- Promoted from position of engineer in the Volunteer Engine Tender Company, which he organized in 1883;
- Removed from office on charge of being "inconsistent and arbitrary" in a dispute with a local bricklayer over work on a chimney. *

Charles Edward Foster
Fire Chief 1904-1923
1927-1942

EUGENE BUSSING January 1, 1923 to August 4, 1927

Eugene Bussing
Fire Chief 1923-1927

- Astoria's water overseer was named by the new City Council to the post vacated by Foster;
- Eleven firefighters left the department in protest over the firing of Chief Foster;

Four years later Bussing handed in his resignation, and

- Council approved the reappointment of Foster without debate.**

C.E. FOSTER August 4, 1927 to April 21, 1942

- Resumed the office after 4 years;
- Retired after 33 years of service as chief.

WAYNE OSTERBY April 21, 1942 to August 1961

- Promoted from the ranks after 20 years of service;
- Suffered a fatal heart attack while fighting a fire in August 1961.

Wayne Osterby
Fire Chief 1942-1961

George Backlund
Acting Fire Chief 1961-62

GEORGE BACKLUND August 1961 to April 1962

- Promoted from the ranks to serve as Acting Chief;
- Resigned due to ill health April 1962;
- Died the same year.

Arnie Rautio
Fire Chief 1962-1976

ARNI RAUTIO April 1962 to August 1976

- Promoted from the ranks after 24 years;
- Went on sick leave in November 1975 after a heart attack suffered while on duty at a fire;
- Resigned August 1976 after 14 years in the post.

EUGENE ROBERTSON August 1976 to December 1987

- Recruited from Medford where he had served 25 years and risen to the rank of chief;
- Resigned after 10 years as Astoria's fire chief.

Eugene Robertson
Fire Chief 1976-1987

Richard Williams
Acting Fire Chief 1987

RICHARD WILLIAMS,
Acting Chief

- Returned from retirement after 30 years of service;
- Served 4 months until Lane Wintermute was hired.

January 1, 1987 to May 1987

Lane Wintermute May 1987 to the present.

- Recruited from the Hoodland Fire District in Clackamas County where he had risen from volunteer firefighter to chief.

Lane Wintermute
Fire Chief 1987 –

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* In the November elections of the previous year, the Ku Klux Klan-endorsed candidates had been elected to the office of mayor, five city commissioners, three port commissioners, one county commissioner, one senator and two state representatives. Anti-Catholicism was a major plank in the Klan's platform, and Chief Foster was a Catholic.

** The Klan's power was broken in 1927 by a citizen's movement led by Merle Chessman, editor of the *Morning Astorian*.

FIRES

A short history of the Astoria Fire Department published in 1950 lists the "mean fires from a fireman's viewpoint" for which records were then available:

July 2, 1883 – Clatsop Mill (see the three photographs on the facing page.)
March 23, 1885 – sash and door factory and Western Hotel
November 20, 1887 – The steamer *Telephone*
August 11, 1892 – Rose Opera House
September 20, 1893 – Clatsop Mill
May 13, 1894 – West Coast Cannery
June, 1894 – Kinney Cannery
February 15, 1901 – Clatsop Mill
1921 – Hammond Mill
1922 – The Great Astoria Fire

On December 8, 1922 at 2:00 a.m., a fire was reported burning behind the Beehive Department Store. It was later established that it had begun in the basement of Thiel Brothers restaurant and billiard parlor on Commercial Street between 11th and 12th Streets–a wood frame building. The wooden viaduct below Commercial Street became a tunnel of flame, enabling the fire to spread to buildings south and west within half an hour.

By 6:00 a.m., 32 square blocks of downtown Astoria were burning. Several buildings were dynamited to create a fire break, and the fire was eventually stopped at Eighth Street at about 1:30 p.m. Only two people had lost their lives: a car dealer who suffered a heart attack while pushing a car out of danger and a logger who hung himself under the docks during the fire. But virtually the whole of Astoria's business district had been wiped out and 2,500 people had been left homeless. Property damage was estimated at $12,000,000. Approximately $2,700,000 was paid on insurance policies.

The Stutz Pumper (now in the Firefighters Museum) was used to draw water from the river to pour on the fire and worked for a full week afterwards, damping down the smouldering embers. It pumped water from the river for another month to augment the city's water supply (see before and after photographs on center pages).

Photos on facing page:

Clatsop Mill Fire, July 2, 1883

HOSECART

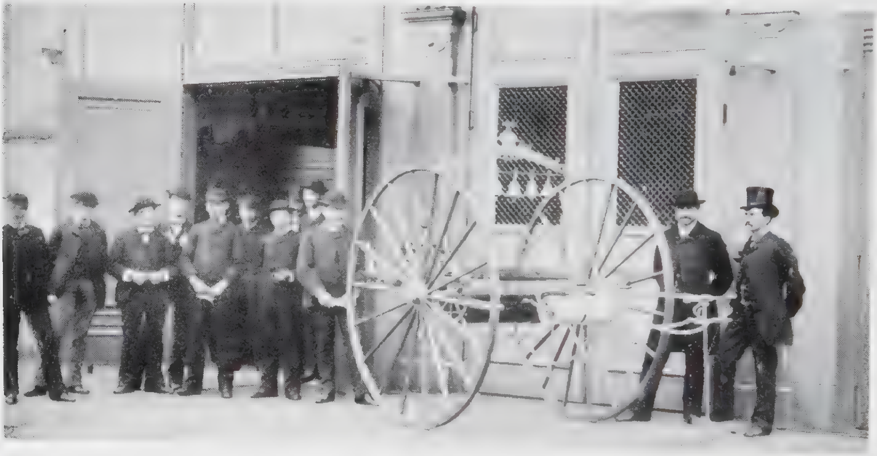
One of the oldest pieces of equipment in the museum is the hand-drawn hose cart. Former Acting Chief Dick Williams remembers that it was stored in the basement when he joined the Department in 1957 and was there when he left thirty years later.

It was pulled by volunteers in the late 1890s and early 1900s and carried reels of hose to be attached to a hydrant or pumper wagon. As late as the 1930s, similar carts carrying extra lengths of hose were pulled (by truck) in emergency situations.

Astoria's racing hosecart teams competed at early fire musters in many parts of the country. Ninety-three year old Sophia Urell, interviewed in 1990, spoke of the thrill of being part of the 12-woman muster team from Astoria that won the Pacific Coast Championship with a cart much like the one on display here. It carried a thousand feet of hose rolled around the axle, and its handle was long enough to accommodate all twelve team members. There were no brakes on the hose-carts, so toward the end of the run, two of the women dropped out and caught hold of ropes trailed from the rear of the cart to slow it down. The other ten had to attach the hose and activate the fire hydrant before their task was done.

The team sport of hosecart pulling continues to this day. The Astoria Fire Department celebrated its 120th anniversary in 1990 by instituting a Fireman's Muster in which several hose teams competed. The 1991 muster was sponsored by the Clatsop County Firefighters Association as well as the Astoria Fire Department.

Note the two nozzles displayed on the cart. The flat one was used to insert between piles of stacked lumber on occasions like the Clatsop Mill fires. (see Fires.) The round one shot a straight stream of water and spray (from the small holes on the barrel) that protected the firefighter from the intense heat of a burning building.



Hosecart and muster team, ca. 1880's

Photos on facing page:

Top – *Hosecart muster team with prize, 1887*
Middle – *Astoria men's hose team, 1892*
Bottom – *Astoria girls' hose team, 1913*

SH MAR

HOOK AND LADDER TRUCK

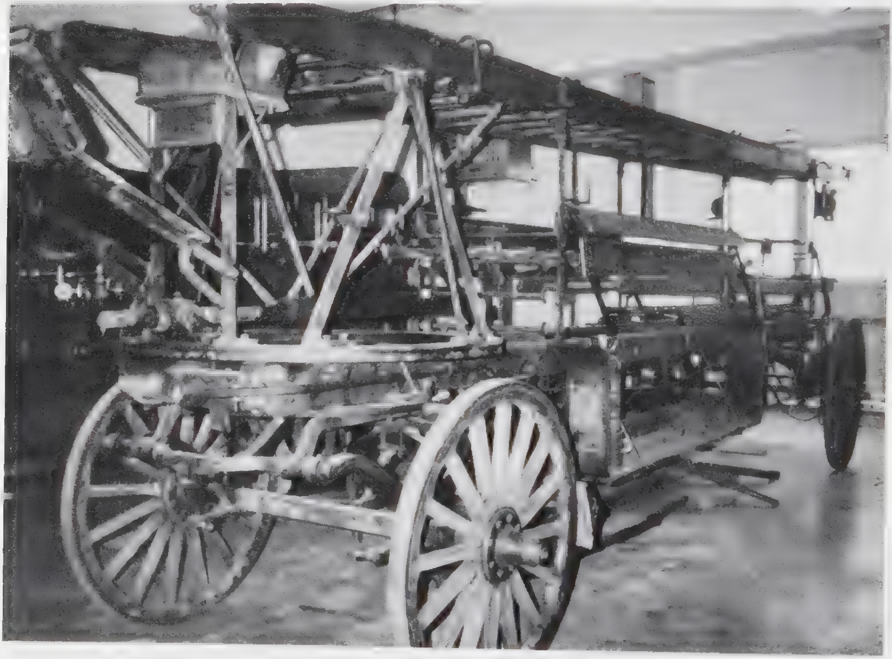
Made by the LaFrance Company of Elmira N.Y.
1876

(Note: The term "hook and ladder" refers to a practice in the earliest days of fire-fighting when wagons were equipped with buckets, hooks, and ladders. The hooks were large, mounted on very long poles, and used to tear down ceilings or walls of burning buildings that could not be reached by any other means before the days of aerial ladders.)

This horse-drawn ladder truck is a Hayes Patent type, manufactured by the same company that made LaFrance Chemical trucks. It carried three types of ladders, all of which may be seen on it today.

The 55-foot extension ladder carried on the top level was raised by a hand-operated worm gear. Former Chief Arni Rautio remembers that when he worked for the Fire Department before he became chief, one of the requirements of anyone who wanted to join the department was to climb the 50-ft ladder extended vertically, go over the top and come down the other side – a feat that required not only courage and strength, but considerable agility.

The last time the extension ladder, and perhaps the truck itself was used, Rautio



Alert hook and ladder wagon

believes, was during the fire that destroyed the Louvre Building on September 22, 1939. Rautio and George (Dobie) Backlund had ascended to the roof via one of the fire escapes and were pouring water into a hole that had burned through the roof when the outer walls suddenly caught fire. The fire escapes were engulfed in flames, and unless the two firefighters could find another way to descend, they were in imminent danger.

They were considering jumping 30 feet to the roof of an adjoining building when Chief Foster ordered the 55-foot ladder extended, and they were able to descend in (comparative) safety.

The other ladders on the truck are a 35-foot truss extension ladder and, under it, two pompier ladders. (see text and illustration on pompier ladders)

The seat at the rear end of the truck was occupied by the "tiller man," whose job it was to turn the back wheels in the opposite direction of any turn the truck was making. Without this maneuvre, it would have been impossible to turn anything as long as the truck without skidding or overturning.

Equipment on the truck includes a section of the large suction hose that was dipped in the river (one to three lengths, depending on the height of the tide) to draw water to be pumped on to the fire.

There are two small fire extinguishers on the running boards. One is a "foamite" used in putting out fires of inflammable liquids. The other is the "soda and acid" type, the prototype of the larger chemical tanks used on chemical wagons. The liquid pumped from these extinguishers is highly corrosive, and firefighters' clothing was sometimes damaged by it.

Note the old-fashioned trash broom lying in the hose bed, used for cleaning up after a fire.

STUTZ PUMPER

This high performance pumper was built in 1921 by the Stutz Corporation of Indianapolis, one of only three "D" models built that year. It came to the Astoria Fire Department second-hand, but quite new, in time to play an important role in the battle against the great 1922 fire. Drawing water from the river with its big suction hose, it pumped a steady stream onto the burning buildings for the 22 hours the fire raged. For many hours of the following day, it pumped river water on to the smouldering embers. For 30 days after that, it pumped water from the river near 14th Street to maintain the city's water supply.

The Stutz Company went out of business during the Great Depression, so no replacement parts were available when the original 6-cylinder engine needed repairs in 1938. The Hall Scott motor presently installed in the Stutz was the best that could be had. Members of the Fire Department agree that it was never as satisfactory. It did, however, keep the pumper in service until 1961, when it broke a drive shaft.

The round metal dome behind the driver's seat is part of the Western Fire Pump–the only positive displacement pump in the Fire Department. (All other pumpers had centrifugal pumps.) "With a positive displacement pump," says former Chief Arni Rautio, "every stroke, there's water coming out. You had to have a nozzle or something open because once it starts pumping, the water has to have an outlet."

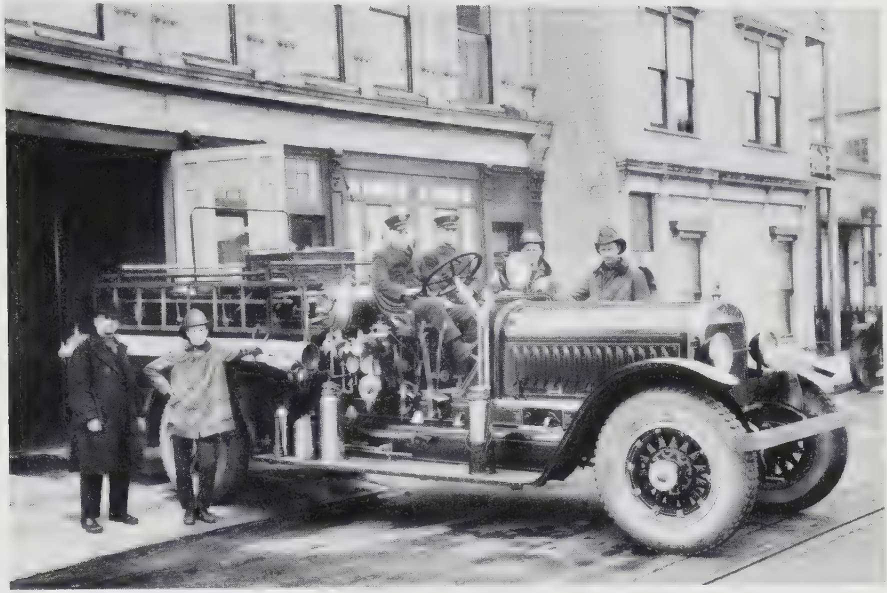
The chemical (soda and acid) tank behind the driver's seat was called the booster tank. Behind it stands the reel of the booster hose. Under the hose bed is the big 500-gallon tank from which water was pumped under pressure from the gas generated in the booster tank.

The main hose laid out in the hose bed was connected to a hydrant in a land-based fire. If the fire was on the water front, one or more sections of the large diameter suction hose (hanging on a bracket alongside the water tank) were dropped into the river. The Stutz could pump over 1000 gallons per minute, which was considered impressive in its day.

Adapters, which could also be used on hydrants, permitted firefighters to discharge four lines simultaneously, except when hydrant pressure was low. In that case, there were adequate lengths of hose to connect to two or more hydrants.

The tires presently on the Stutz were bought by Chief Osterby in the late 1940s. They look new because the truck was so frequently out of service in the years when the 6-cylinder engine was failing and afterwards when the replacement engine was in trouble.

The pumper, like other fire department vehicles, was used to transport accident victims in the days before Astoria had ambulance service. The victim would be laid on a stretcher like the one on display in the museum, carried to the truck, laid on the hose bed, and driven to the hospital.



Stutz pumper in front of Headquarters Station
Fourth & Astor streets

AMERICAN LAFRANCE CHEMICAL WAGON

1911

Rehabilitated and restored by members of
the Astoria Junior Chamber of Commerce

Astoria's first motorized fire truck was a 1909 LaFrance. It was in service until 1943 when its transmission gave up the ghost on one of Astoria's hills. The one on display is another of the same model, purchased in 1911 from the company in Elmira, New York. It carried hose for the steam pumpers that were in use at the time and at least one roof ladder, now loaded on a bracket on the passenger side.

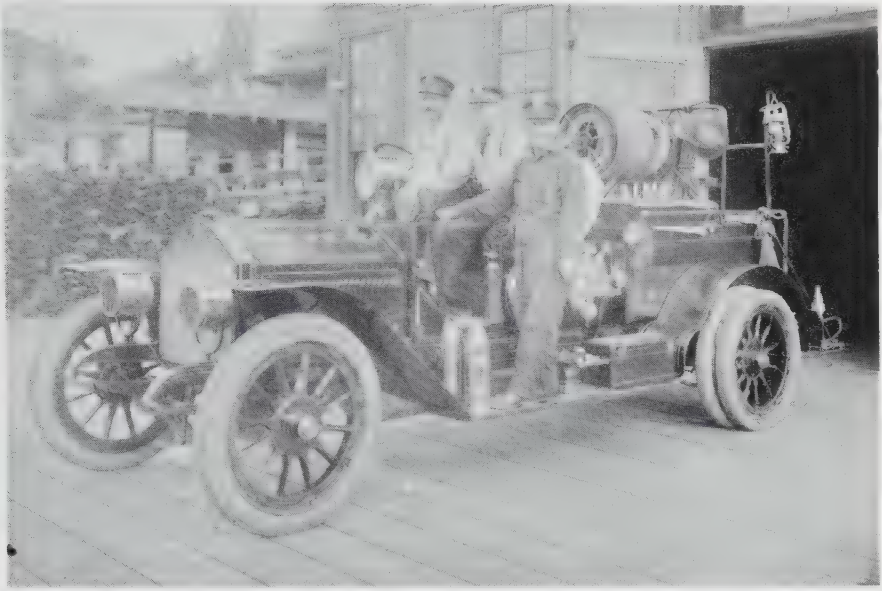
The 35-gallon chemical tank under the driver's seat was pressurized by inverting a cup of sulphuric acid into the soda water in the tank. The gas thus created powered a stream of water from the tank that provided a quick attack on a fire.

Like all engines of its day, the LaFrance had to be started with a crank. The hole into which the crank was inserted has been covered up in the restoration, but the compression release (used before cranking) can still be seen on the right side of the projecting chassis support.

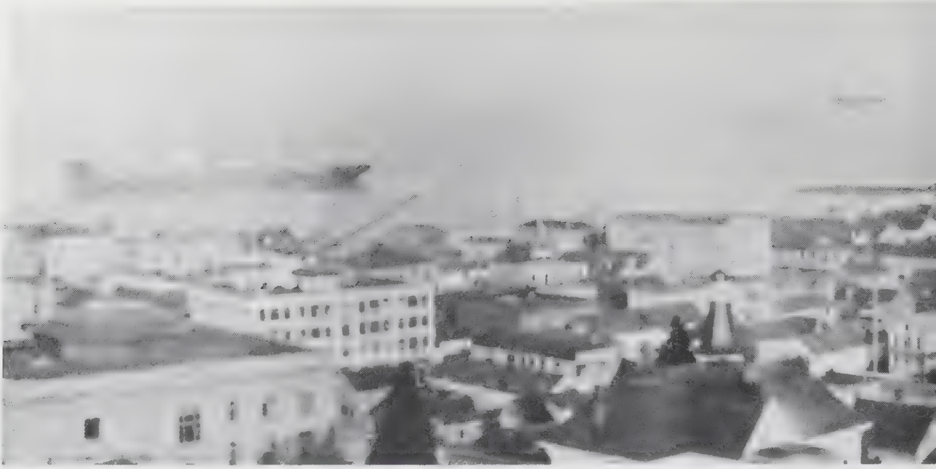
Note the front tires, which appear to be, but are not solid. Originally, all fire truck tires were solid and had to be jacked up and kept on chocks when not in use, lest they flatten out. This station had a type of movable chock that the engine could simply roll off when it started away.

Behind the chemical tank is the 1 1/2-inch booster line hose used in the initial attack on a fire. The man at the wheel was responsible for activating the booster line while other firefighters were attaching the main hose to a hydrant, or–if the pressure was low–to a pair of hydrants. In the case of a fire near the waterfront, the 6-inch hose was used to draw water from the Columbia River.

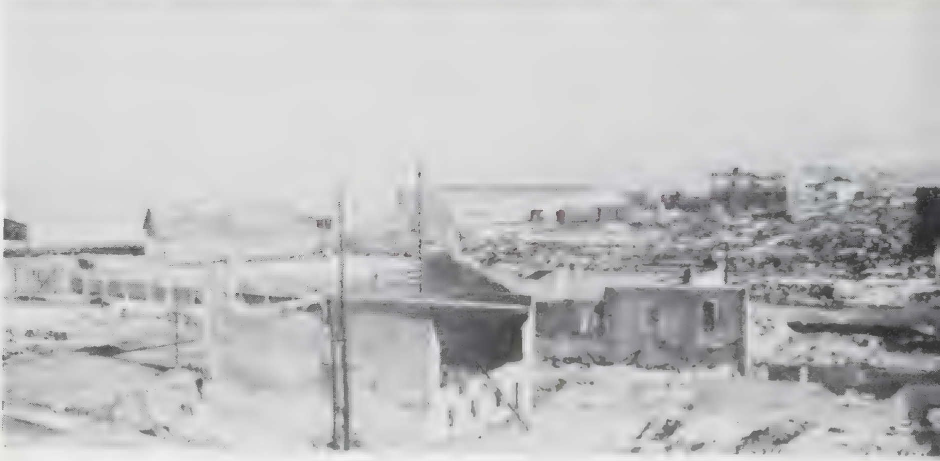
The drive train is a chain drive from a rear-mounted transmission. The 1940s vintage 6-cylinder engine is not the original, but there are plans to replace it with the type of 4-cylinder engine it was equipped with when it arrived.



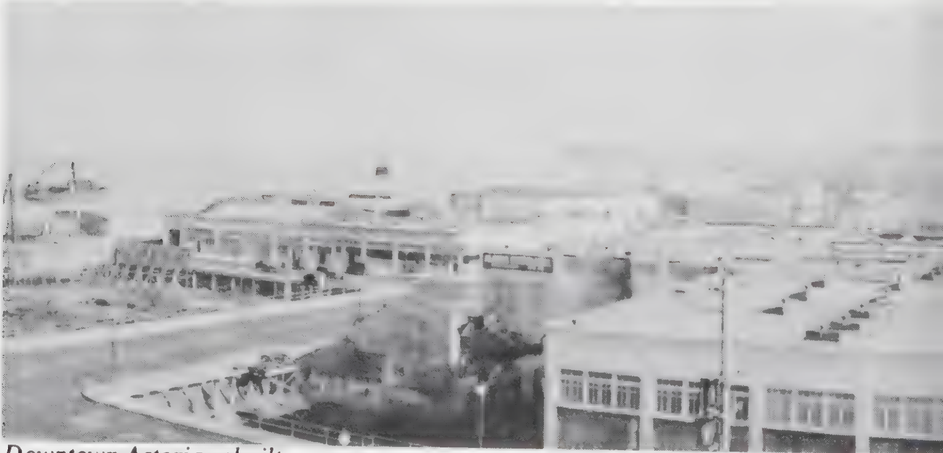
American LaFrance in front of fire station.



Before the great Astoria fire of 1922.



After the great Astoria fire of 1922.



Downtown Astoria rebuilt.

LADDERS

There are three beautiful wooden pompier ladders in the museum; one on the hook and ladder wagon and two displayed on the walls.

The French word *pompier* means fireman, and the literal meaning of the term is "fireman's ladder." The original design, however, was not French, but German. It was brought to this country in the early 1879s by a man named Christian Hoell, who joined the St. Louis, Missouri Fire Department and trained pompier ladder squads. He did the same later in New York City.

At one time pompier ladders were in use in virtually all U.S. fire departments, including Astoria's, but they have been largely supplanted by the aerial ladders (see the large ladder on the hook and ladder truck). Pompiers are now used mainly in the training of fire-fighters for high work.

Figure 1 shows a Pompier ladder being raised. When it is flat against the building and the gooseneck is at the level of a window or roof edge, the firefighter will rotate the ladder so the gooseneck attaches over the sill. The firefighter can then climb the ladder, straddle the sill of the window, and lift a second ladder to a window on the next highest floor.

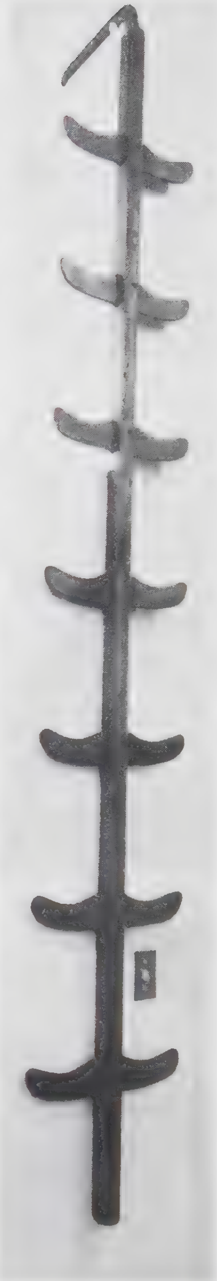
Figure 2 shows another method of using the second pompier ladder. Here the firefighter has placed the gooseneck of the second ladder in an adjacent window one floor up and is swinging over to climb it. When he has reached the sill of this higher window, he can raise the first ladder to the next floor higher and climb it, or lower it if he is ready to descend.

Pompier belts (one of which is on exhibit) were snapped on to the ladder the firefighter was using until he was ready to swing, then unsnapped and snapped on to the second ladder.

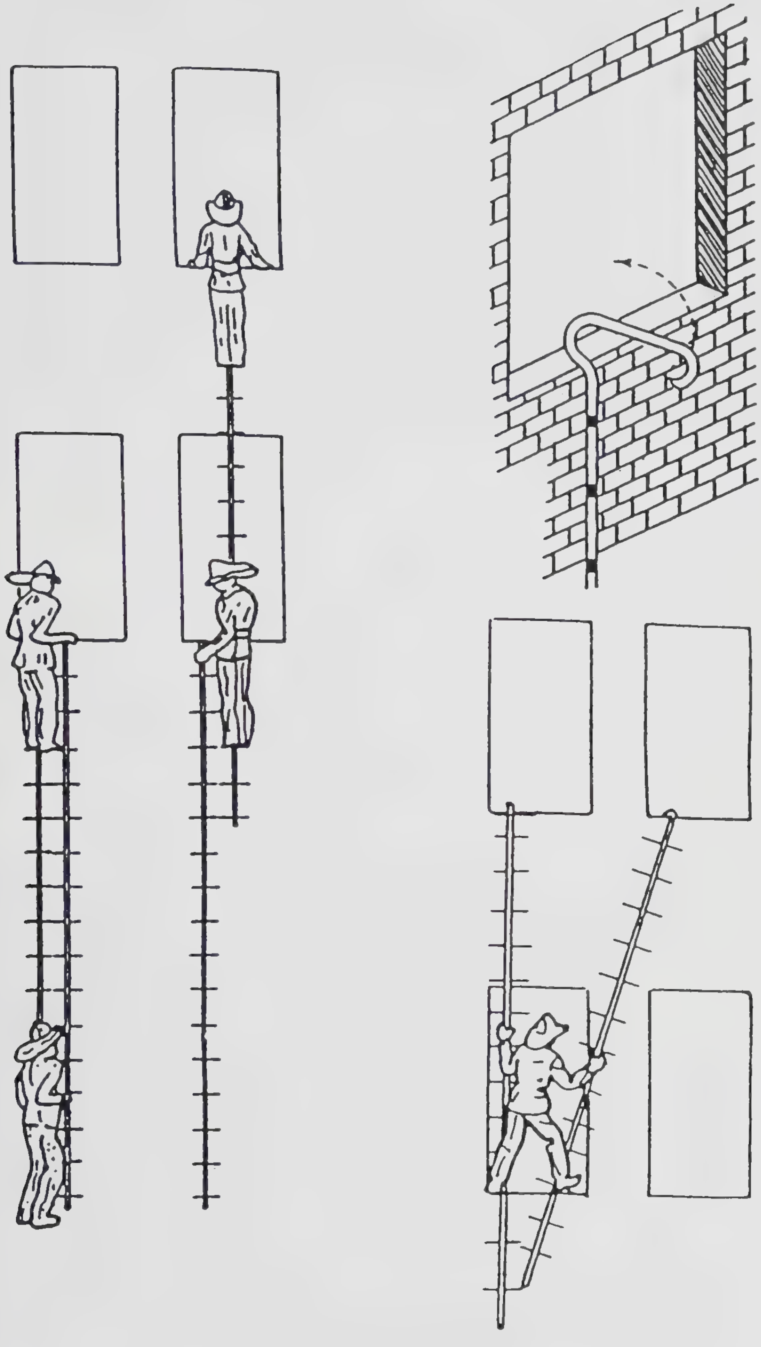
Assistant Fire Chief Lenard Hansen says, "The pompier ladder would enable you to go from ground level to the roof of a structure no matter how high it was." Light and relatively easy to lift, they required great skill in the placement of the gooseneck and in the movement from the first to the second ladder, especially in the swing maneuvre. Their use has declined over the years as the number of accidents in which they were involved increased.

The heavy wooden ladder with two hooks folded inwards is called a roof ladder. Its hooks were spring-loaded and could be pivoted forward to catch the top of a pitched roof or a window sill. They served to hold the ladder in place without the need for any other bracing. There is another roof ladder carried on brackets on the passenger side of the 1911 American LaFrance.

The tallest ladder in the museum is the extension ladder displayed on the hose bed of the hook and ladder truck. (see the interview with Chief Rautio for details on its use.)



Pompier Ladder



Diagrams of Pompier ladder in action.

MACK PUMPER ENGINE

The Mack Model 85 was ordered in 1945 and delivered in 1946–brand new and the top of the line, equipped with a centrifugal 750 gallon per minute pump.

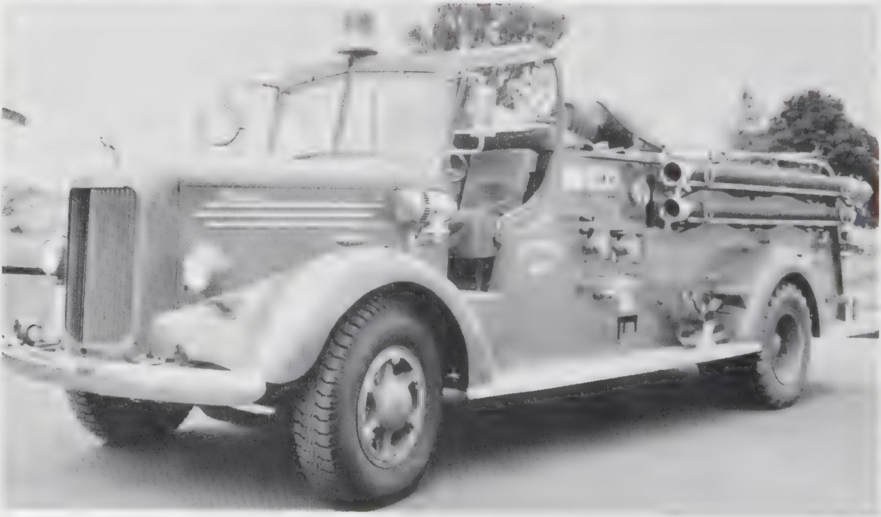
Other equipment included:

- A 100 gallon water tank, for the initial attack on a fire;
- A length of 4 1/2 inch suction hose displayed on the left rear side of the water tank;
- Three 2 1/2 inch ports, two on driver's side, one on the passenger side;
- A revolving red light above the cab;
- Another flashing red light on the driver's side, now, a clear glass lens;
- A working flood light mounted on the passenger side.

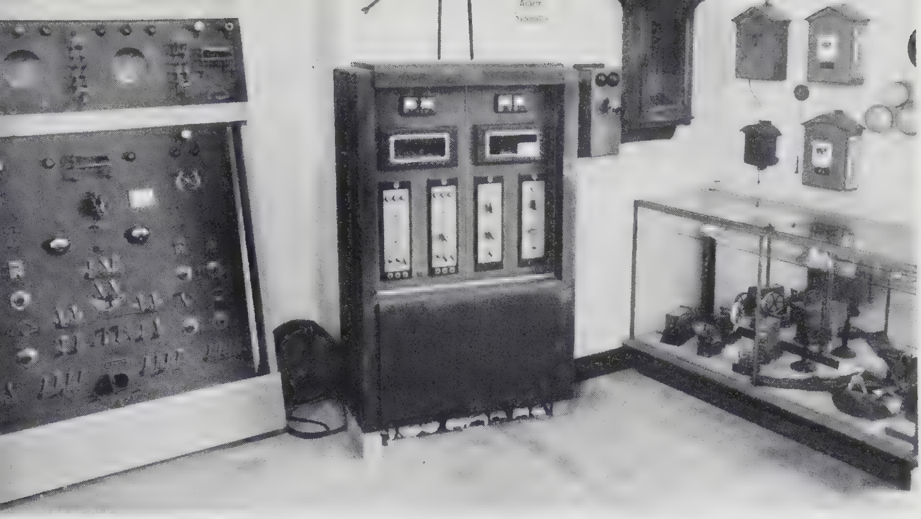
Even with such warning lights, firefighters today report accidents caused by the failure of motorists to see the flashing lights or hear the sirens, especially those, who are playing car radios at top volume.

When the Mack arrived at the scene of a fire, the procedure was as follows: the driver put the engine in 4th gear and pulled the transfer gear just behind driver's seat to disengage the rear axles. He then shifted into the first of the slots that may be seen on the side of the truck behind the driver's seat. This engaged the positive displacement primer pump, which created a vacuum that pulled water into the pump either from the river or the truck's tank. As soon as the primer pump was operative, he disengaged it and engaged the centrifugal pump, which sent water out through hoses attached to the three ports.

The gas engine is a six-cylinder Thermodyne, manufactured by the Mack Company. It had double spark plugs and a dual ignition system, so that if one failed, there was a back-up.



Mack truck



Alarm equipment

Upper Left - early fire box location board. Lower Left - alarm location panel, Tongue Point.
Lower Center - alarm location panel, Headquarters Station.
Extreme Right - alarm boxes on the wall, safety equipment in case.

ALARM EQUIPMENT

Along the walls and in the display cases you will find many components of the alarm system used in Astoria in the 1960s, including:

- Alarm bells, including the original one used in the Astoria fire alarm system;
- A telephone used in the alarm system.

Fire boxes were posted on corners in downtown Astoria and in many buildings. Each of these boxes had a number. When someone pulled the alarm handle, a machine punched that number onto a tape at the headquarters station from where it was automatically relayed to substations. Other parts of the system included:

- The board on which the numbers and locations of fireboxes were displayed at headquarters;
- The tape punching machine and rolls of tape;
- The control panel.

By the 1960s, fires were sometimes reported by phone. In that case the dispatcher checked the address and relayed the number of the nearest alarm to it to all stations. The one that was closest was expected to get there first, but all the substations were on alert in case their assistance was needed. "One call did it all."

The fire alarm boxes were taken out by Chief Rautio in the 1970s "because it became too time-consuming to teach new recruits how to use it." At that time the Department switched to the "total phone" system in use today.

Also on display is the switch board of the Tongue Point system, which is considerably more modern.

LIFESAVING EQUIPMENT

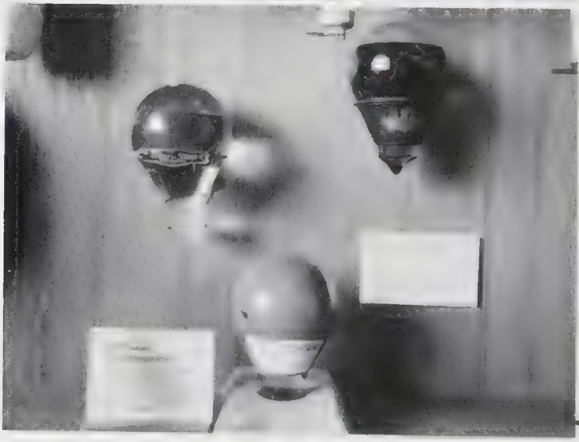
There are two types of stretchers: one made entirely of canvas and taken from an old civil defense vehicle; the other made of metal mesh.

The canvas stretcher was used in rescue work before there was ambulance service in Astoria. Accident victims were lifted on to this kind of a stretcher, laid on the hose bed of a Fire Department vehicle, and driven to the hospital.

The metal mesh stretcher was used in marine rescues in which the victim often had to be lashed in place while being lifted from the water. The Fire Department did all marine rescue work before the Coast Guard took over.

There are also two life nets on display, one with a red bull's-eye, one without. These nets were held by between 8 and 10 firefighters and used to break the fall of people jumping from second and third stories. Casualties often resulted, but were fewer if the jumper aimed for the center of the net – hence the red circle. "If you didn't hit the bull's eye, you might end up hitting the sidewalk."

Life net



Carbon tetrachloride bombs

EQUIPMENT IN DISPLAY CASES

In display cases on the main floor you will find many different kinds of fire - fighting equipment, while cases on the second floor are devoted to items of protective clothing: helmets, masks, uniforms, etc.

One case contains used to protect against or extinguish fires. There are a number of examples of carbon tetrachloride "bombs." At one time these glass vessel were hung in the basements of many business establishments. When a certain degree of heat was reached, the metal that held the vessels in place would melt; it would drop, shatter, and release the liquid fire retardant. Such devices were in common use until they were proved to be hazardous to firefighters who had to enter areas where they had exploded and breathe the resultant fumes. Eventually an even more serious hazard was discovered: when carbon tetrachloride hits very hot metal it generates deadly phosgene gas.

Another case contains the tape punching machine (see the Alarm System), a pompier belt worn by firefighters using the pompier ladders, and climbing boots used to climb utility poles when the fire alarm system's wires were damaged in a storm.

Other cases display:

- The tools (spanners and wrenches) used to open hydrants or connect hose couplings;
- Nozzles of different vintages (some nozzles are also displayed on the walls, see Miscellaneous Equipment);
- Suction hose used for taking water from a river or from a flooded basement;
- A pike pole for making holes in ceilings. (If a fire was burning between floor and ceiling, firefighters used this to break into and tear down a ceiling to get water to the fire.)

Various sizes and types of nozzles.

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT

Two types of fire axes are on display in the museum. The heavier type has a head weighing over 6, but usually under 19 pounds and is similar to those used today. It serves in many ways: for chopping, for prying (such as shingles off a burning roof), or for "poking"--making an inspection hole in a roof to determine whether or not there is fire below. The thinner axe head is a much older type, no longer in general use.

There are different types and sizes of nozzles on display. The most powerful and most modern has an adjustable diameter, a shutoff handle in bright metal, and two black handles that were held by firefighters. It took as many as three men to control this one when it was working at full power.

Also on display are a long-handled wire cutter used on electrical wires and leather buckets used to fill the old pumpers. Teams of volunteers formed "bucket brigades" that worked fast enough to shoot a spray 35 feet in the air, which was considered remarkable then.

There is also a graphic illustration of the use of a battering ram to open a locked door.

In the corner nearest the street is the original pole by which firemen descended in response to an alarm.

Battering ram in use.

Hose rack, looking up from ground floor.

Firefighter Tony Arigoni and friends.

Postcard available for purchase.

Postcard available for purchase.

INTERVIEW WITH ARNI RAUTIO

DECEMBER 30, 1991

As Fire Chief Arni Rautio remembers it, he was connected with the Astoria Fire Department from the time he was six years old. "We lived at First and Bond, close to the old headquarters station at Fourth and Astor. A lot of us kids used to play there, and Chief Foster got so he'd let some of us–those he knew pretty well–ride the fire engines to a fire. We'd help laying out hose and cleaning up after the fire. So I was pretty well familiar with the work of a fireman long before I joined the department."

Chief Rautio

Arni Rautio was five years old when the fire of 1922 destroyed most of the Astoria business district. "My father was away longshoring at Westport, and my mother was alone with three kids. I was the youngest. She was getting pretty worried. The fire got as close as Eighth Street, but it stopped there." Early next morning his mother took all three children down to the Spexarth Building, and he remembers seeing many buildings still burning or smoldering.

When Rautio joined the department in 1938, he was assigned to the old Uniontown Station. "They weren't using horses by that time, but the wooden floor was scarred by the horses' hooves digging in when they started out. It had to be replaced a number of times over the years."

His first day on duty was a challenging one. "I was alone in the station when they called me from headquarters and said there was an alarm from up in the vicinity of the Captain Robert Gray School. I told them I was alone, but they told me to crank up the LaFrance and get up there as fast as I could. Uniontown was the closest station to the site, so I'd have a head start of maybe ten minutes. If you get on to a fire early enough, you can keep it from spreading. If it gets a start, it's a lot more difficult.

"So I cranked up the LaFrance, drove it up to the fire, got the booster line off, activated the soda and acid chemical tank, and by the time the headquarters crew arrived, it was working just fine."

Rautio describes the procedure followed in attacking a fire as follows: "When you got to a fire, you hooked up to a hydrant immediately. If you had a man on the tail gate, that was his job. If you were alone, you put a clamp on the hose coming out of the truck and left it while you activated the chemical tank for the booster line and started spraying.

"Meanwhile, if you had a second or third man, he would hook up the 1 1/2 inch line to the 2 1/2 inch line from the hydrant and go into the fire with that. We could get 100 pounds of pressure, which was considered good in those days."

Asked about equipment used to protect firefighters in his day, Rautio says,"We used fog and spray nozzles to protect the firemen as he went in. In a confined area, you don't need too much water to reduce the heat of a fire.

"We didn't bother with masks. What we had was a face piece with goggles and two big sponges on the sides. You wet them and breathed through them. Eventually they'd get clogged, and when you weren't getting air, you had to get out or be dragged out." There was no protection against gas fumes, but the Fire Department knew where most hazardous chemicals were and treated a fire there accordingly.

"When I was fire chief, Astoria was pretty broke. I realized that by spending a little money on prevention, I could save the Department more in the end. So we instituted a pre-inspection of all dwellings and buildings. They filled out a form listing anything they had stored that would be hazardous to breathe. That record was on a card along with a number. When a fire was reported, firemen would check the building's card before going. If there was a hazardous substance involved, they would take precautions."

Astoria's tight budget didn't deprive the Fire Department as much as it might have. "I had to make out the budget every year and figure how many hours of overtime we could afford. Sometimes it wasn't as much as I would have liked, but we never once came out in the red

"And I had many friends, some of them wealthy business people. When we had a need like for furniture or something–I'd go to them and ask, and they'd send whatever it was out to us, used, of course, but in good condition."

By 1962, when Rautio succeeded Acting Chief George Backlund, "There were 27 men in the department, nine men per shift. We had three stations: Headquarters at 15th and Commercial, Uppertown, and Uniontown. Each shift we had three men in each station, plus a dispatcher always on duty at Headquarters Station. There were two shifts and a relief shift. That adds up to 27."

Twenty-seven paid firefighters manned the three stations, but Rautio also persuaded the City Council to institute what was called the "extraman program." These men, also called "sleepers," lived in the station, but only had to respond to calls that came while they were on the premises.

"That was in the early days of Clatsop College, and the extraman program was open to students who could meet our qualifications. Students who couldn't afford to pay for lodging while they went to college could live in one of the stations. Actually we had them in all three. Day times they went to classes, and at night they were on duty. I think they got a small wage, maybe $100 a month, and, of course, they had to pay for their board out of that.

"About half a dozen of those sleepers went on to be firefighters. One is a sheriff in midwestern Oregon today. Another is a deputy sheriff in Portland. Later Councils changed the terms of the agreement we had worked out, and it no longer attracted students. But it was a good program while it lasted.

Captain Al Graichen

"Before that, some of the captains' families lived on the upper floor of the stations. Al Graichen's family lived in the old Alderbrook Fire Station at 45th and Leif Erickson where the community building is now. Wayne Osterby's family lived upstairs in the Uppertown Station when he was battalion chief. Dan Lake and his family lived in the Uniontown Station. When they discontinued letting the captains' families live in, they increased their pay to compensate.

"The other men had a choice: they could go out to meals or cook for themselves. We had kitchens in the fire houses and sometimes what they did was bring meals from home and heat them up.

And if you were on duty on a holiday, why some group or maybe some one of the businesses would send in a special dinner."

In October 1975, Chief Rautio became ill while fighting a waterfront fire at the Bargain Barn. Advised by his physician that he had suffered a mild heart attack, he went on sick leave on November 1, hoping to regain his health and resume his post. But in August of 1976, after 38 years as a member of the Astoria Fire Department–14 of them as chief–he submitted his resignation.

Assistant Chief/Fire Marshall Lenard Hansen and Former Chief Arni Rautio.

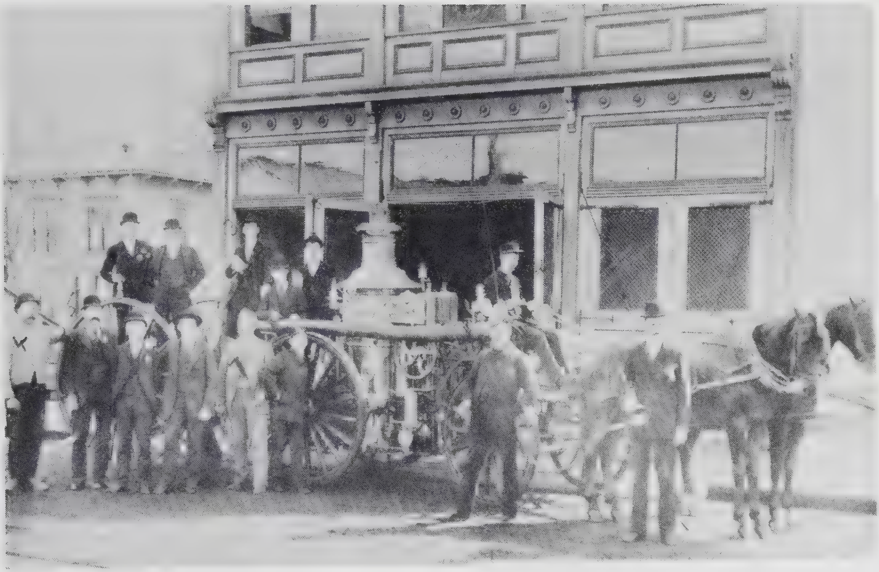
PICTURES FROM OUR ARCHIVES

Among the many pictures from the archives of the Fire Department and the Clatsop County Historical Society are two of the fire engines no longer on display.

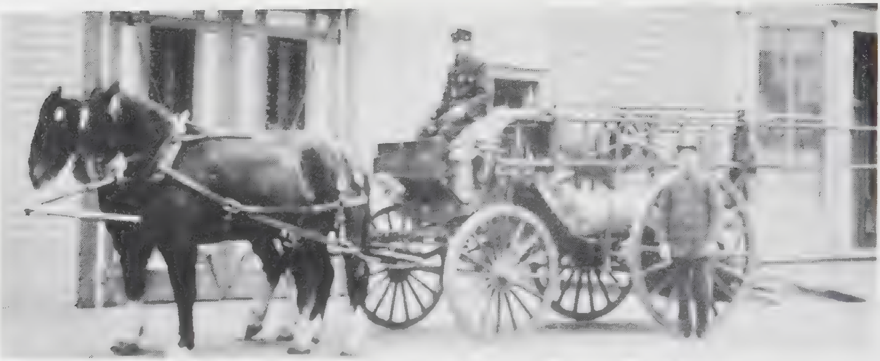
One is of a steam pumper which was fired by wood or coal, generating in its boiler the steam that forced water through the hose nozzle. This steam pumper was in the station in 1941, but was sold for junk sometime during the next four years.

Another is of an old chemical truck of which the chassis is all that remains. It is on exhibit near where the pictures are hung.

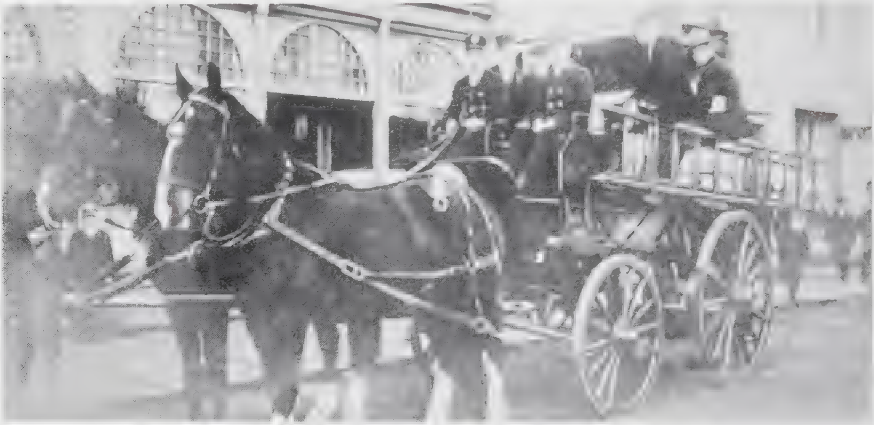
There is a group picture of the Fire Department taken during the time when C.E. Foster was chief, which contains two other soon-to-be-fire chiefs: Wayne Osterby, who would follow Foster in that office, and George (Dobie) Backlund, who became acting chief when Chief Osterby died.



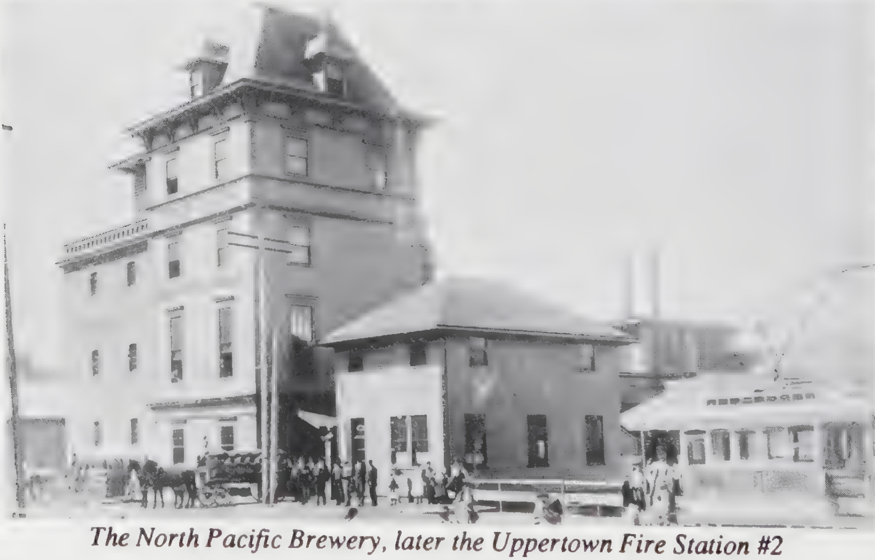
Amuskeag steam pumper
1894



Champion Chemical Wagon in front of station at 10th & Bond streets.



Hose wagon



The North Pacific Brewery, later the Uppertown Fire Station #2

GHOST STORY

Questioned about the rumor that a ghost haunts the upper floors of the Uppertown Fire Station #2, now the Uppertown Firefighters Museum, Dick Williams, who served 33 years in the Astoria Fire Department, including four months as acting chief, is reluctant to commit himself. Although he spent many nights in the dormitory on the second floor, he never saw a ghost.

"But there were definitely strange noises up there at night. Definitely! And funny things did happen. Not all the time, but every couple weeks, once a month maybe.

"Lots of times Sid Larsen and I would be just sitting there in the evening, maybe watching TV, and we'd hear strange noises up in the gymnasium. We swore somebody was there–somebody that got in that wasn't supposed to be there. We'd go up and look, but there was nothing!

"Sid would say, 'It's that darn ghost again'

"Sometimes it was so noisy you couldn't believe it. Whoever was up there was dragging stuff across the floor. Something was floating around upstairs in that gymnasium for sure."

Asked whether the ghost ever descended to the second floor, Williams shrugs noncomittaly. "There was all kinds of little incidents like that. There was this big calendar on the wall in the dayroom. You'd be passing it, and all of a sudden it'd lean out from the wall.

"And those lockers in the dormitory!* Sometimes in the middle of the night something would rattle those doors. And that was not just a little noise! We could be asleep, and we'd jump up, me and Sid Larsen, and go all over the building to find out who had snuck in. But we never found anything.

"I remember one night–it was about four in the morning, Sid jumped out of bed and said, 'What do you want?' He called over to me, 'Hey, get up.' I got up, and Sid said 'Someone was in here! Standing there by my bed staring at me. Woke me up.' " That time they searched all three floors and, as usual, found nothing.

Acting Chief Williams

The Uppertown Station #2 was retired in 1960 (when the new headquarters station was built directly behind it). "But they kept some equipment stored there," Williams says, "so the oil furnace had to be kept going to keep the building dry. That furnace was cranky, and you had to monitor it, so they'd send someone from headquarters up there late in the afternoon to check it for the night.

"I've had guys come back and say they heard funny noises up there when they were checking in the basement. One of them told me one time, he was pretty sure it was haunted, and he wasn't going up there. 'You'll have to fire me first.' So I found someone else to go.

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* *The firefighters' gear lockers stood along the wall where now the display cases of uniforms stand.*

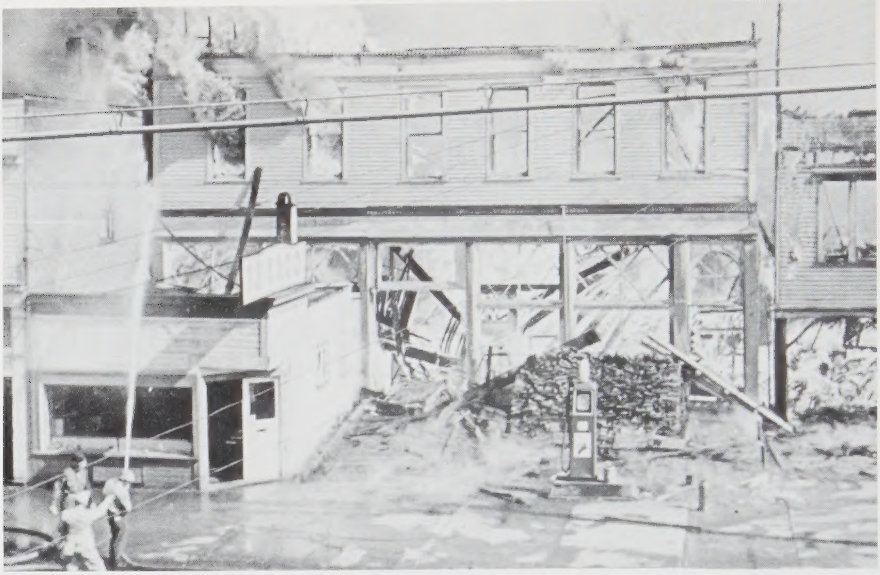
"One time we got up a pool. Each guy put in $10 to pay somebody to go up there and sleep overnight. But no one would. Too spooky. Of course after they converted the furnace to oil, it wasn't necessary to monitor it so much, so we didn't have men sleeping up there."

In answer to the question: whose ghost was it? Williams shrugs and says, "Well, there was a man fell through the pole hole and was killed. He was a 'sleeper,' had lived there for years and years. Some people say that's how come there's a ghost still floating around up there. He never bothered anybody, the ghost didn't."

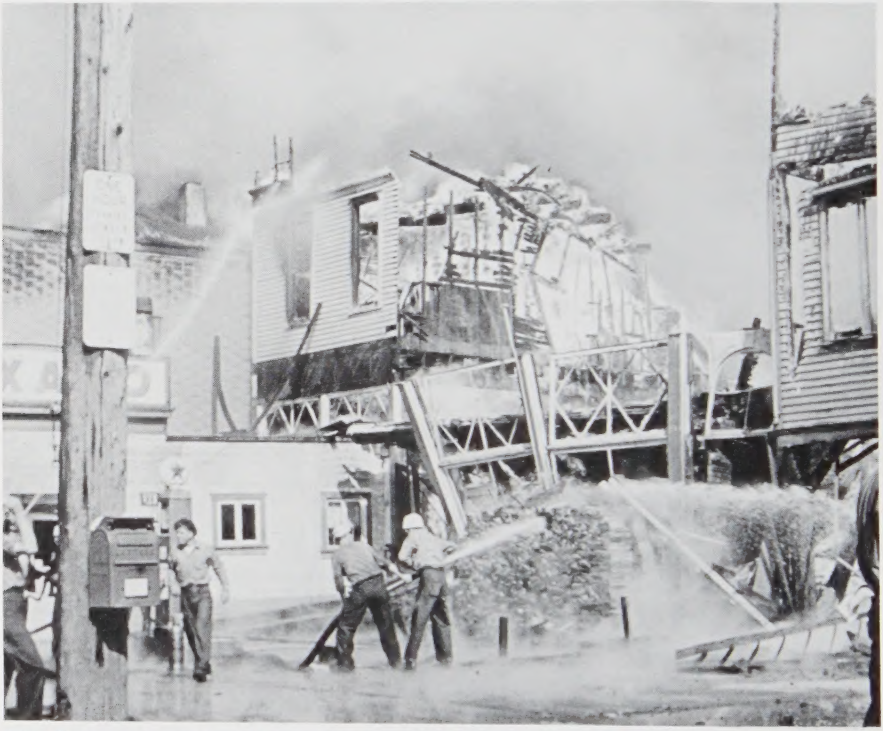
If the Uppertown Fire Station ghost is that of Paul Marion, a 35-year-old firefighter who was killed in a fall through the pole hole in 1928, he is haunting the wrong fire station. The old Central Station at 4th and Astor Streets, where he walked in his sleep, has long since been torn down, but the Uppertown Firefighters Museum may seem a more familiar environment than the building that replaced it. Williams' final word about the ghost suggests a possible reason for the rumor: "The firemen that worked at the Uppertown Station were devoted to their jobs. They had the idea that if you were doing your job correctly, were honest about it, and put out a fair effort, everything would be fine. But if a person kind of reneged on his work, he'd maybe have a little fear of the ghost."

To the suggestion of a Hallowe'en fund-raiser for benefit of the Firefighters Museum, Williams says, "You wouldn't get many of the firemen to take that bait."

Firefighter descending the pole in the Uppertown Station — now the museum.



Fire fighters in action Hannula Boarding House fire, 1943.



Firefighters in action Hannula Boarding House Fire, 1943.

Photographs courtesy of the following people and institutions.

Bill Lind: front cover, page 26 (right), back cover. *Clatsop County Historical Society*: pages 1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18-19, 22, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, inside back cover. *Astoria Fire Department*: page 3. Arni Ratio: pages 6 (Osterby), 36. *Lenard Hansen*: pages 7 (Wintermute), 9. *Jeffrey Smith*: pages 20, 23, 24, 25, 26 (left). *Andrew Cier*: page 30. *Seaside Signal*: page 35.

Heritage Museum, Clatsop County Historical Society

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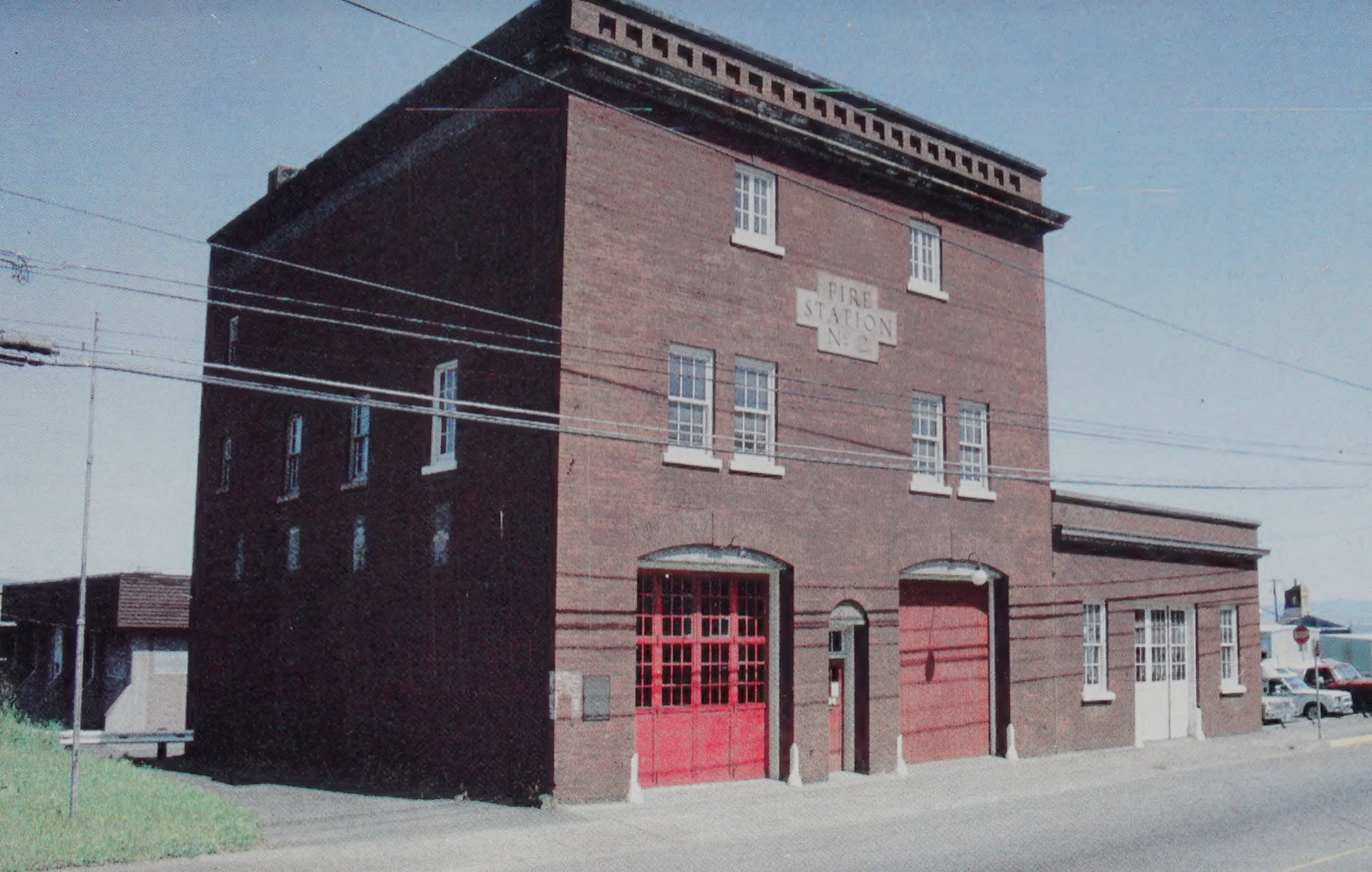
FIRE
STATION
No 2